

## Some Peculiar Papuan Customs.

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By MISS L. S. GIBBS.

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In 1913, in the course of Phytogeographical work at about 7 to 8,000 ft. in the ARAK Mountains, of Dutch N. W. New Guinea, my carriers, both men and women, were drawn chiefly from the WARIAP and STARI, small "campongs" on the S. W. coast of GEELVINK Bay.

While on the March these people collected the leaves of *LAPORTEA* or *FLEURYA*, sp., tying them neatly into bundles. As soon as climbing began they constantly rubbed these leaves on forearms and legs to the knees with great zest and evident enjoyment. On another occasion during the ascent, the grandson of the "KORANO" or headman of WARIAP, a most active and intelligent young fellow, stood stoically while the skin of his calves was sliced in spirals, deep enough to let blood flow freely from each cut. This operation was performed by the Malay, or rather Timorese, sergeant (in charge of the escort kindly provided by the Dutch authorities) who thoughtfully explained beforehand what was about to happen. Beyond the fact that it was a peculiarity of the "PAPUAS" to suffer in the head, I unfortunately did not gather the further drift of his remarks.

On the return journey, a young woman of STARI was brought up as "sakit prut" and given a good dose of Glauber's Salts. She appeared next morning to thank me for her recovery—her forearms and legs to the knees thickly smeared with faeces and accompanied by several companions similarly treated.

It would be interesting if readers of the "Asiatic Journal" could parallel similar instances amongst other native tribes, or possibly those ethnologically conversant with the customs of primitive peoples may be able to elucidate these examples.

### APPENDIX I.

I have read with interest Miss Gibbs' note on "Some peculiar Papuan Customs" and amongst them I have noticed a Papuan Custom which corresponds with much similarity to a custom of the ARAWAKS and MACUSI Indians of British Guiana.

During several surveying journeys in that Colony, I have noticed that when on long journeys especially if carrying heavy baggage, the natives have often rubbed themselves with a kind of

nettle (KAMARI ?) in order they said to stimulate themselves, and give quicker action to the blood, and the same after a time gives them a most soothing effect, which enables them to carry on their work.

It is also done I understand for anyone suffering from back-ache, when the back is beaten with the nettle, until it sometimes bleeds.

W. R. HUMPHREYS, F.R.G.S.,

LIEUT. R. F. A.

## APPENDIX II.

Giraldus Cambrensis states that the Roman nettle *Urtica pilulifera* was introduced into Great Britain by the Romans under Julius Caesar. The soldiers brought some seed of it and sowed it at Romney for their use to rub and chafe their limbs when through extreme cold they should be stiff and benumbed, being told before they came from home that the climate of Britain was so cold that it was not to be endured without some friction to warm their blood. I cannot get any confirmation of this from any of the Greek and Latin authors, but it seems to be a parallel to the accounts of Miss Gibbs and Lieut. Humphreys, as to the use of urtication for relieving chill and stiffness in the limbs.

H. N. RIDLEY.